



Language Development and Communication

- Receptive Language
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- Foundations for Writing

“The basic need to communicate coupled with a rich and stimulating language environment seem to be the main factors that propel children’s early language learning. Parents, grandparents, and early education caregivers need to know that child language development begins in infancy and is an ongoing process in which young children expand and refine their knowledge and use of language largely with the help of facilitating adults.”

Dorothy S. Strickland

From birth, children are learning language. As families and other caregivers talk, sing, laugh, read, and interact with children, they are providing a strong beginning for them to become successful readers and writers. Children of preschool age are beginning to develop many language competencies, using language as a tool to communicate their needs, interact socially with others, and describe events, thoughts, and feelings.

Research increasingly demonstrates that children who are provided environments filled with print, books, and conversations with supportive adults acquire knowledge and skills that greatly facilitate their success when they begin to receive formal instruction.

In North Carolina, an increasing number of children entering school come from families who speak a language other than English. The competencies addressed in this domain can be developed in any language and, for most children, will be developed first in their primary language. Strengthening language and communication competencies in children's native languages helps prepare them for the additional task of learning English.

Dialogue: *The Wide World of Words*

Taking advantage of the bilingualism of his classroom families, the teacher read "The Three Little Pigs" aloud in English and then had Maria's mother read the story in Spanish. Afterward, the children acted out the story, using puppets, sticks, straw, and pretend bricks, and the teacher pointed out that the props would be available in the dramatic play center along with audiotapes of the story in the two languages. During center time, Jesús put a wolf puppet on his hand and approached Alice, saying: "Huff, puff, blow down!" Alice pointed to "No!" on her augmentative communication board. Jesús then turned to Johnny and repeated his command. Johnny declared, "Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin!" After observing the children's play for a period of time, the teacher made a note in his anecdotal records that the three children could repeat parts of a story using new language and vocabulary with enthusiasm.

Receptive Language

Receptive language traditionally refers to a listening vocabulary, knowledge of spoken words, and understanding connected speech. Here it also refers to understanding non-verbal language such as signs, gestures, and picture symbols, and includes expectations that reflect the needs of children using non-verbal communication.

Widely Held Expectations

Children begin to:

- Understand increasingly complex sentences, including past, present, and future tenses.
- Understand and use a growing vocabulary.
- Attend to language for longer periods of time, such as when books are read, people are telling stories, and during conversations.
- Consistently respond to requests for information or action (e.g., respond to questions and follow one- and two-step directions).
- Comprehend and use language for multiple social and cognitive purposes (e.g., understand and talk about feelings, ideas, information, and beliefs).
- Develop familiarity with sounds in words (e.g., listening to, identifying, recognizing, and discriminating).
- Understand that people communicate in many ways, including through gestures, sign language, facial expressions, and augmentative communication devices.

Strategies for Early Educators

- Use facial expressions, gestures, and a rich and varied vocabulary when speaking and reading with children.
- Introduce new words and concepts by labeling what children are doing and experiencing while providing opportunities for conversations.
- Give children clear instructions that help them move from simple directions to a more complex sequence. State directions positively, respectfully, carefully, and only as needed.
- Use gestures and props to help children understand and respond to verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Provide opportunities throughout the day for children to talk, share, and discuss stories and interact with each other and with adults.
- Engage children in one-on-one conversations; listen and respond to what they are saying.
- Tell stories and read aloud to children, repeating their favorite books. Vary the tone and pitch of your

voice while reading to emphasize different characters, moods, or other qualities in a story.

- Help children discriminate sounds in spoken language through rhymes, songs, and word games, using various media (e.g., CDs and tapes of music and stories).
- Offer different types of music rhythms, patterns, and tempos and have the children imitate these by clapping or playing musical instruments.
- Model and provide opportunities for children to communicate in different ways (e.g., home languages and also manual signs, gestures, and devices).

Strategies for Families

- Talk with your children. Engaging in conversations whenever and wherever you are together helps them understand increasingly complex language and words.
- Assign simple tasks. Engaging children in small jobs helps them learn to follow directions. Directions should be clear and positive and kept to a minimum.
- Be expressive. Use gestures and props to help your child understand and respond to verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Be a good listener. Notice and respond to what children say and do. Ask questions and pause to give them time to think and respond.
- Protect your child's hearing through routine health examinations and prompt medical attention to suspected ear infections.
- Have fun with words. Singing songs and playing rhyming and word games (nursery rhymes, poems, finger plays) help children develop an understanding of different sounds.
- Help children understand and appreciate that communication occurs in many ways, through languages that are different from your own and also through manual signs, gestures, and devices.
- Talk, sing, and play with your children using your home language – the language you know best.

Expressive Language

Expressive language includes speaking and other means of communication such as sign language and use of communication devices.

Widely Held Expectations

Children begin to:

- Use verbal and non-verbal language (gestures, devices, signs, and picture symbols) to communicate for multiple purposes (e.g., to express wants, needs,

ideas, feelings, and to relate personal information and experiences).

- Use language as a part of pretend play to create and enact roles.
- Use language to establish and maintain relationships.
- Initiate and engage in conversations.
- Describe experiences and create and/or retell simple stories.
- Ask questions and make comments related to the topic of discussion.
- Communicate messages with expression, tone, and inflection appropriate to the situation.
- Use increasingly complex and varied language structures, sentences, and vocabulary.

Strategies for Early Educators

- Create an environment of trust and support in which children feel free to express themselves.
- Provide opportunities for children to engage in dialogue, through frequent one-to-one conversations, small group interactions with adults, and with other children.
- Encourage children to describe their family, home, community, and classroom.
- Pause when reading and talking so children can ask questions and propose answers.
- Help children remain focused on the main topic of conversation by redirecting and restating current ideas.
- Encourage creative attempts at putting words and sentences together to use language for a variety of purposes.
- Build on children's interests when conversing with them.
- Provide props and opportunities that generate discussions and questions.
- Support children's use of their home language, gestures, communication devices, sign language, and pictures to communicate.
- Talk with children using their families' native language (through interpreters when necessary).
- Create an accepting, culturally diverse environment that is nurturing, supportive, and interesting for all children.
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage conversation.
- Ask questions that stimulate children's creativity.
- Expand on what children say by adding information, explanations, and descriptions.

Strategies for Families

- Encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Provide opportunities for your child to talk in social situations with adults and other children.
- As you read to children or talk with them, pause to let them ask questions, make comments, and complete ideas.
- Seek out your child's opinion. For example, ask, "What do you think we need to do?"
- Encourage children to discuss and add to stories as you read to them. Ask "What do you think will happen next?"
- Talk daily about everyday events and activities.
- Use descriptive language. If your child observes, "That's a dog," respond "Yes, that is a big, white dog."
- Show interest in what children have to say by asking open-ended questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" response.
- Set an example for good speech and language. Use complete sentences and pronounce words correctly.
- Support children's use of gestures, communication devices, sign language, and pictures as needed to communicate.
- Encourage children to speak the language used in the home. This will not interfere with learning English.

Foundations for Reading

Foundations for reading involves developing knowledge and skills in oral language, vocabulary used in understanding the world, concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and phonology.

Motivation for Reading and Vocabulary and Comprehension Widely Held Expectations

Motivation for Reading – Children begin to:

- Show an interest in books, other print, and reading-related activities, including using and sharing books and print in their play.
- Enjoy listening to and discussing storybooks, simple information books, and poetry read aloud.
- Independently engage in reading behaviors (e.g., turning pages, imitating adults by pointing to words, telling the story).
- Independently engage in writing behaviors (e.g., write symbols or letters for names, use materials at the writing center, write lists with symbols/letters in pretend play, write messages that include letters or symbols).

- Show preferences for favorite books.
- Use books that communicate information to learn about the world by looking at pictures, asking questions, and talking about the information.

Vocabulary and Comprehension – Children begin to:

- Develop knowledge about their world (what things are and how they work) and use this knowledge to make sense of stories and information books.
- Discuss books by responding to questions about what is happening in stories and predicting what will happen next.
- Relate personal experiences to events described in familiar books.
- Ask questions about a story or information in a book.
- Imitate the special language in storybooks and story dialogue (repetitive language patterns, sound effects, and words from familiar stories) and use it in retellings and dramatic play.

Strategies for Early Educators

- Provide and share fiction and non-fiction books that stimulate children's curiosity.
- Create comfortable and inviting spaces in different parts of the classroom for children to read; stock these reading nooks with a variety of reading materials.
- Provide time when children are encouraged to look at books on their own.
- Promote positive feelings about reading. Allow children to choose books they want to read. Reread favorite books.
- Make multicultural books and materials available to help children develop an awareness of individual differences.
- Create a connection between home and school through such means as developing a take-home book program, sharing books from home, engaging parents in literacy experiences, holding workshops, or creating a newsletter for parents.
- Provide multi-sensory approaches to assist reading (e.g., tape players, computers, and assistive technology).
- Point out authors and illustrators and discuss what makes a book a favorite book.
- Provide children with materials they can use to act out and retell stories (flannel board cutouts, puppets, props, pictures, etc.).
- Respond to children's observations about books and answer their questions.
- Reread books multiple times, changing the approach as children become familiar with the book. On occasion, ask questions that tap their understanding

of why characters are doing things and talk about the meaning of unfamiliar words.

- Make books available in children's home languages.

Strategies for Families

- Read with your child every day.
- Help instill good reading habits by regularly reading books, magazines, and newspapers and discussing what you read.
- Bring into your home a variety of high-quality reading materials that are relevant and interesting to children.
- Talk about connections between your child's personal experiences and events and objects in books you've read.
- Visit the library regularly with your children and let them select favorite books. Suggest to friends and relatives that they give books as gifts.
- Encourage your child to read books along with you, ask questions, and retell the stories. Reread favorite books.
- Use your home language when reading, singing, and playing word games with your child. You will be helping your child learn and enjoy the time you spend together.

Book and Print Awareness, Alphabet Knowledge, and Alphabetic Principle Widely Held Expectations

Book and Print Awareness – Children begin to:

- Be aware of print and understand that it carries a message by recognizing and creating it in different forms and for a variety of functions (e.g., labels and signs).
- Recognize that print can tell people what to do, and understand that print and simple symbols are used to organize classroom activities (e.g., where to store things, when they will have a turn).
- Pretend to read familiar books in ways that mimic adult reading.
- Hold a book upright while turning pages one by one from front to back.
- Occasionally run their finger under or over print as they pretend to read a familiar book.
- Understand some basic print conventions (e.g., concept of letter, concept of word).
- Learn to identify their name and the names of friends.

Alphabet Knowledge – Children begin to:

- Know that letters of the alphabet are a special category and are different from pictures and shapes.

- Recognize and name some letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name and in the names of others who are important to them.

Alphabetic Principle – Children begin to:

- Understand that letters function to represent sounds in spoken words.
- Make some sound-to-letter matches, using letter name knowledge (e.g., writes "M" and says "This is Mommy").

Strategies for Early Educators

- Draw children's attention to print in the environment and discuss what it is communicating (e.g., instructions, labels, menus).
- Assist children in creating their own books, class books, and stories.
- Reread books multiple times, changing the approach as children become familiar with the book. On occasion, ask questions that tap their understanding of why characters are doing things and talk about the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Use children's names in daily routines (e.g., to mark turns, keep track of who is present, etc.) to help them become familiar with the letters in their names.
- Discuss letter names in the context of daily activities (as opposed to teaching one letter per week) and provide opportunities for children to hear specific letter sounds, particularly beginning sounds.
- Provide opportunities to explore letters and sounds (e.g., with literacy tools and models such as magnetic letters, rubber stamps, alphabet puzzles, sponge letters, clay, ABC molds, and alphabet exploration software).
- Make books available in children's home languages.

Strategies for Families

- Read to your child every day.
- As you read, call attention to the many different kinds of written materials in your home (labels, newspapers, magazines, cereal boxes, recipe cards, greeting cards) and in the outside world (billboards, menus, signs).
- Read alphabet books. Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Point out letters in familiar names and signs.
- Give children magazines, menus, lists, notes, tickets, and other print materials to use in pretend play.
- Use your home language when reading, singing, and playing word games with your children. You will be helping your child learn and enjoy the time you spend together.

Phonological Awareness Widely Held Expectations

Phonological Awareness – Children begin to:

- Enjoy listening to songs, poems, and books that have rhyme and word play and learn the words well enough to complete familiar refrains and fill in missing words.
- Enjoy and repeat rhythmic patterns in poems and songs through clapping, marching, or using instruments to beat syllables.
- Play with the sounds of language, learning to identify and then create rhymes, attending to the first sounds in words.
- Associate sounds with written words, such as awareness that different words begin with the same sound (e.g., Keshia and Katie begin with the same sound).

Strategies for Early Educators

- Read and reread books that have rhymes and refrains. Encourage children to fill in missing words and complete familiar refrains.
- Play word and rhyme games. Sing songs. Repeat chants.
- Discuss letter names in the context of daily activities (as opposed to teaching one letter per week) and provide opportunities for children to hear specific letter sounds, particularly beginning sounds.
- Provide opportunities to explore letters and sounds (e.g., with literacy tools and models such as magnetic letters, rubber stamps, alphabet puzzles, sponge letters, clay, ABC molds, and alphabet exploration software).
- Make available books in children's home languages.

Strategies for Families

- Read and reread books that have rhymes and refrains. Encourage your child to join in.
- Recite nursery rhymes. Sing songs. Play word games.
- Share alphabet books. Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Point out letters in familiar names and signs.
- Use your home language when reading, singing, and playing word games. You will be helping your child learn and enjoy the time you spend together.

Foundations for Writing

Foundations for writing involves a progression of developing skills, beginning with using symbols with meaning, then writing scribbles that have meaning and attempting to make letters.

Widely Held Expectations

Children begin to:

- Use a variety of writing tools and materials (e.g., pencils, chalk, markers, crayons, finger paint, clay, computers).
- Use a variety of writing in their play and for a variety of purposes (e.g., labels, lists, signs, messages, stories).
- Represent thoughts and ideas through drawings, marks, scribbles, and letter-like forms.
- Learn how to tell their thoughts for an adult to write.
- Play with writing letters and mastering conventional letterforms, beginning with the first letter of their name.
- Use known letters and approximations of letters to write their own name.
- Attempt to connect the sounds in a word with its letterforms.

Strategies for Families

- Encourage your child to scribble, draw, and print by keeping markers, crayons, pencils, and paper on hand.
- Talk about what you are doing as you write, to help your child relate writing to everyday life (such as making out a check or creating a shopping list).
- Invite your child to help you write a note or compose a greeting card.
- Respond enthusiastically to the drawings, scribbles, letter-like shapes, and other writing your child produces.
- When your child asks, help with writing familiar words and numbers, such as family names and phone numbers.
- Encourage children to retell experiences and describe ideas and events that are important to them.
- Provide food packages and magnetic letters for your child to explore letters and sounds. Point out writing on packages.
- Accept and celebrate your child's writing attempts, understanding that it takes many years to learn to form letters and spell in conventional ways.

Strategies for Early Educators

- Give children opportunities to draw, scribble, and print for a variety of purposes.
- Provide a variety of tools, such as markers, crayons, pencils, chalk, finger paint, and clay. Provide adaptive writing/drawing instruments and computer access to children with disabilities.
- Promote literacy-related play activities that reflect children's interests by supplying materials such as telephone books, recipe cards, shopping lists, greeting cards, and storybooks for use in daily activities.
- Provide a variety of literacy props in centers (e.g., stamps and envelopes for the post office; blank cards, markers, and tape for signs in the block center).
- Help children use writing to communicate by stocking the writing center with alphabets and cards that have frequently used and requested words (e.g., "love," "Mom," "Dad," and children's names with photos).
- Show step-by-step how to form a letter on unlined paper when a child asks.
- Encourage children to retell experiences and events that are important to them through pictures and dictation.
- Write down what children say and share those dictated writings with them.
- Think aloud as you model writing for a variety of purposes in classroom routines (e.g., thank-you notes, menus, recipes).
- Assist children in making their own books and class books.
- Display children's writing and comment on their successes.
- Use unlined paper for children's writing so they will focus on letter formation instead of letter orientation.